

## Government proposes shake up in child protection services

Lynn Eaton *London*

The government has announced details of a proposed shake up in children's services in an attempt to avert another case of avoidable child death such as that of Victoria Climbié, the child who was murdered by her great aunt in February 2000.

In its consultation paper, *Every Child Matters*, the government proposes much closer working between primary healthcare services and local authority children's services, which are to be radically overhauled.

By 2006, the government wants to see all children's services, including children's health services, integrated into children's trusts, to be run by local authorities. The trusts would include community and acute health services, such as community paediatrics, teenage pregnancy coordinators, child and adolescent mental health services, and speech and language therapy.

The trusts would be headed

by a director of children's services, accountable for both education and social services within a local authority.

Primary care trusts would be expected to agree relevant sections of their delivery plans with the director of children's services and would be encouraged to delegate responsibility for commissioning these services to the children's trust.

The green paper also proposes appointing an independent children's commissioner to champion children's views in England, a proposal which met with approval from the National Society of Cruelty to Children, the BMA, and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, all of whom have been lobbying for such an official for some time.

"The children's commissioner is something we have been pressing for for some time," said a spokesperson from the royal college. "We are very pleased indeed."

Wales has had a children's commissioner since 2001, and Scotland passed legislation earlier this year for such an official. Northern Ireland has a children's commissioner, Nigel Williams, appointed in June 2003.

The government also proposes that local authorities hold computerised details of every child's name, address, date of birth, school attended, and GP. These data would be attached to an identification number, such as the child's NHS number, and would also indicate whether a child is known to education welfare services, social services, or police or youth offending teams. If more than one agency were involved the lead agency for that child would be shown. Where a professional was concerned about a child they could indicate this on the system, for other professionals to see.

It also intends to place a new responsibility on health services and the police to join "local safeguarding children boards."

Victoria Climbié died in February 2000 at the hands of her carers, Marie-Therese Kouao and Carl Manning, despite having had contact with four social services departments, three housing departments, two specialist child protection teams of the Metropolitan Police, two hospitals, and a families centre managed by the children's society the NSPCC.

The government's consultation paper, published on Monday, follows a report by Lord Laming into the child's death (*BMJ* 2003;326:239).

Professor Alan Craft, president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, said the proposed changes would make a huge difference to social care and education for children. "But there is a real potential that it is going to be difficult for them to join up health," he warned. □

*Every Child Matters* is available at [www.dfes.gov.uk/everychildmatters](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/everychildmatters)

## US clinics fear violence after execution of antiabortion murderer

Janice Hopkins Tanne *New York*

US family planning clinics, women's health centres, and abortion providers fear new attacks after Paul Hill was executed in Florida for murdering a doctor who provided abortions, and his volunteer bodyguard.

Hill, a former Protestant preacher, killed Dr John Bayard Britton, aged 69, and his guard, James Barrett, 74, a retired lieutenant colonel in the air force, in July 1994, and wounded Dr Britton's wife, June, a retired nurse. Hill said he killed to prevent the killing of more children by abortion.

Dr Britton flew in to Florida to provide abortions one day a week at the Ladies Health Center in Pensacola, a conservative town on the Gulf coast. In March 1993, Dr David Gunn, who did abortions at the other women's clinic in Pensacola, was murdered by Michael Griffin, now serving a life sentence. Hill appeared on national television after the murder by Griffin and called it "justifiable homicide."

Hill later said on a website he decided to kill abortionists while he was on the beach with his wife and three children. Hill noticed

that Dr Britton always arrived at the clinic early. On the day he committed the murder, Hill came to the clinic before the arrival of the police escort, which had been delayed by car trouble. He killed the bodyguard with a shotgun and then, because he thought Dr Britton might wear a flak jacket, fired at his head and killed him.

"Leaders of the extreme [antiabortion] wing [are calling] for an increase in violence after Paul Hill," said a spokesperson for the National Abortion Federation, which represents more than 400 non-profit and private clinics, women's health centres, and physicians in the United States and Canada.

Violence increases several months after an incident, the spokesperson said, because

antiabortionists meet—as they did in Florida when Hill was executed—and then encourage further violence. "We take it seriously. They stop at nothing, including murder," she said. □



Paul Hill was executed last week